DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 968 FL 019 523

AUTHOR Hartley, Elizabeth A.
TITLE How Can We Meet All Their Needs? Incorporating Education for the Gifted and Talented into the Multilingual Classroom.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 10p.; In: Theory, Research and Applications: Selected Papers from the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (16th, Denver, Colorado, March 30-April 3, 1987); see FL 019 511.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Acceleration (Education); *Acculturation; Advanced Courses; Advanced Placement; Age Grade Placement; Bilingual Education; *Cognitive Style; *Cultural Pluralism; *Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Independent Study; Language Role; Mentors; *Minority Groups; Resource Centers; Student Evaluation; Talent; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Expectations of Students; Teacher Interns; Tutorial Programs

ABSTRACT

This discussion of identification and instructional needs of minority gifted or talented (G/T) children in the multiethnic classroom looks at a variety of issues, including teacher expectations, native or dominant language and its effect on the results of assessment, acculturation and attitudes toward mainstream society, and learning styles. Eight instructional strategies that can be incorporated into the multiethnic classroom by the classroom teacher are described and their advantages are outlined. These strategies consist of: (1) resource/action learning centers; (2) mentorships (tutorial); (3) independent study; (4) special advanced courses; (5) internships; (6) cluster or task grouping; (7) content acceleration; and (8) grade level acceleration. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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HOW CAN WE MEET ALL THEIR NEEDS? INCORPORATING EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED INTO THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

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Elizabeth A. Hartley

ED336968

This paper discusses a number of issues surrounding the identification and instructional needs of minority "gifted and/or talented" (G/T) children in the multi- ethnic classroom. These issues include teacher expectations, native language, assessment, acculturational factors and learning styles. Subsequent focus is on eight instructional strategies which can be used to more appropriately serve minority G/T students in the multicultural classroom.

A practical workshop designed for the classroom teacher working in a multi-ethnic school environment as well as for teacher trainers who are preparing new teachers for multicultural education settings is presented. Factors influencing the identification of and programming for minority and linguistically diverse "gifted and/or talented" students are discussed. This discussion is followed by a critical look at eight instructional strategies which can be incorporated into the multi-ethnic classroom to serve these special students' needs. The multi-ethnic environment referred to here frequently consists of a rich mixture of Asian, Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Euro-American students.

Much has been done in terms of "regular" education for minority and linguistically diverse students, as well as, special/handicapped education for the same. However, the needs of these students at the level of "gifted and talented" are seldom addressed. In the multi-ethnic classroom the wide variety of students presents a true challenge to educators. They encounter a diverse population to whom they must be culturally sensitive. Educators must be aware of the variety of attitudes, abilities and , in general, the cultural backgrounds of the children who come to their classrooms. These factors directly affect how minority children "fit" into the present U.S. definition of gifted and talented and whether or not their exceptional abilities and talents will be recognized. Often many gifted and/or talented (G/T) minority students are hidden in the "lower" echelon of students when described by their academic abilities. For this reason, it is essential to look for these exceptional students' abilities in a variety of ways and, thus, address their educational needs in a more appropriate and effective manner.

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The U.S. Office of Education's definition of gifted and talented students is necessarily very broad. Each state and local education agency interprets the definition differently depending on their stated philosophy and goals. How the needs of "gifted and/or talented" Black, Asian, Hispanic and American Indian students are met depends directly on these interpretations. Frequently, these students are under-served in traditional-type G/T programs. Such programs are defined by their dependence on academic aptitude and proficiency as prerequisite for entry. Intelligence and achievement tests are often used as the sole screening or identification measures. All educators need to consider what the purpose of the G/T program is, what unique talents and abilities of students are to be tapped, what educational strategies would be best suited to nurture these abilities and talents, what resources are available to provide for these students' needs in the school setting, what physical environment best fits the various students' learning or cognitive styles and what kind of time is necessary to provide for the tasks and the students' capabilities and interests. Family interests also play a very important role in educational programming as vehicles for cultural saliency concerning the products expected of the students.

After these general considerations are taken into account, some specific factors which influence the identification of and educational programming for minority and linguistically diverse G/T students need to be investigated. For the purposes of this paper, these are 1) teacher expectations, 2) native/dominant language and its influence on assessment, 3) culture and acculturational factors and, 4) learning (cognitive) styles. A brief discussion of each factor follows.

Teacher Expectations

What the literature and research have indicated for years is that what a teacher expects in the classroom is what the students will give him or her. Therefore, when educators expect minority students to exhibit certain behaviors and abilities and not others, the students are not given fair opportunity to demonstrate their true strengths. It is important to not only give the students appropriate academic opportunities but also opportunities to exert leadership in other non-academic areas where students can safely build their self-esteem. Increased self- esteem may then be applied with success to academic areas where, previously, these students' abilities may not have been readily observable.

Providing exposure to environments different from the students'

everyday life - for example, trips to museums or hiking in the mountains - is one way to help them develop greater mental flexibility in novel situations, as well as, to increase their knowledge to be used as a basic, creative "tool". "How can a student be inspired to become a botanist without ever being exposed to more than flowers seen at the supermarket?" Providing opportunities that challenge and encourage minority G/T students is certainly a creative job for teachers.

Native/Dominant Language and Assessment

When a child's native language is other than English, native language influence can lower the results of identification measures which are primarily dependent on English oral and written language. This, in turn, results in many linguistically diverse children being under-served by programs for the gifted and talented.

Some measures of intellectual ability have been developed which are considered "culture free" or "culture reduced" which, generally, means they depend very little on linguistic or other cultural content for assessment. One such measure is the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven, 1962). It has been found reliable in identifying "bright" minority children. However, negative results do not indicate a lack of "brightness", only an inability to perform well on the behaviors required by this measure.

In attempting to identify minority and linguistically diverse students for G/T programs it is recommended that a variety of measures be used in order to identify the maximum number of students. Avoid cut-off scores as an "end-all". These are useful for funding only. It is to any school's advantage to find as many ways as possible to identify as many G/T children as possible. A composite of measures can uncover abilities and talents that one or two might not. For example, a file for each child including Raven's CPM scores, Structure of Intellect (SOI) scores (Guildord, 1967; Meeker, 1969), and parent, student and teacher nominations or checklists. Teachers can use the Renzulli-Hartman scale (1971) and parents can write a small biography of their child. Teachers experience, is also a critical factor in their classrooms. This all leads to a gestalt of identification less dependent on language abilities and more pertinent to the students needs and abilities. The less dependent the identification is on standardized measures, the more probable will be the inclusion of more minority children in G/T programs.

Keep in mind that continuous evaluation and assessment of children is

the only way to keep up with their needs. The same philosophy that is held for special education programs in terms of evaluation needs to be considered, as well, for G/T education.

Culture and Acculturation

A child's background, whether rural, suburban or urban, fifth generation migrant or immigrant, directly affects the degree of acculturation the child has experienced. For example, exposure to and acceptance of the dominant society's values will influence how the child will accommodate him or herself into the mainstream classroom. How a particular culture or subculture perceives the value of mainstream education will influence their children's motivation and achievement in the school setting. School is also a culture and must be learned. Realize that often educators are asking minority students to become bi-cultural in asking them to learn and assimilate the school culture and to become tri-cultural when asking them to assimilate the dominant society's values, as well.

Educators, with some training, can identify certain attitudes that a child carries toward the mainstream society. This knowledge can help the teacher approach the child with better understanding. Parents must also be approached with such sensitivity and understanding. Frequently, the more culturally traditional a community is, the more educators must be sensitive to the community values of exceptionality. With the variety of ethnicities involved in multi-ethnic classrooms, educators must be very flexible in working with the community at large.

Some indicators of acculturation to look for might be: the family system (nuclear or extended), first and second language use and proficiency, value orientations, community status, community and social identity, socioeconomic status, and many more. Each of these areas runs along a continuum. In addition, many minority students differ in their exposure to educational opportunities. That is, what kind of educational experiences have they had in the past or have been available to these students? Learning to ask the right questions and to look at students and their community as a whole are the educators' responsibilities.

Learning/Cognitive Styles

It has been shown that various cultural backgrounds tend to encourage different learning styles and modes. Our mainstream culture emphasizes

individual work and achievement. These attributes, are not necessarily compatible with some students' backgrounds and resultant learning styles.

When considering learning styles and modalities educators must remember not to make generalizations based on stereotypes. Learning styles tend to be situation specific, for example, field-sensitive v. field-independent styles. Educators should attempt to discern the style or modality in which their students function must efficiently. In a multi-ethnic classroom educators need to use as many learning modalities as possible in presenting content (e.g. visual, kinesthetic, aural, etc.,). Also, it is important to provide varied learning environments in the classroom so that all students have optimal learning opportunities. (The instructional strategies to be described presently lend themselves to this.) Most of all, provide students time to think and time to answer. Many cultural groups value listening and learning and encourage considered thought before speaking. What appears to be slowness may only be what a student knows as correct behavior.

The above factors, among others, need to be considered when developing more appropriate learning opportunities for minority and linguistically diverse G/T students. In light of these factors, eight instructional strategies that can be incorporated into the multi-ethnic classroom by the classroom teacher are described below. Positive aspects for classroom teachers will be highlighted.

The eight strategies demonstrated here are:

1) Resources/Action Learning Centers. Learning areas created for active student involvement with materials usually reflecting a subject area focus. A laboratory setting designed to stimulate curiosity, broaden student knowledge and interests; students working together or independently on pursuits of their choosing; and through contracting agreement with advisor-teacher.

Advantages:

-The classroom teacher might have immediate knowledge of each student's needs and could tailor learning centers in the classroom to meet those needs.

-Student's activities may be more effectively integrated with his/her ongoing classroom program.

-Centers in the classroom may tap hidden talents of other students not heretofore identified as G/T students.

2) Mentorships (tutorial). One or more students working with a qualified adult or other student on a regular basis, matching identified student needs in an area of study with a person having particular expertise in that study area.

Advantages:

-The classroom teacher could be the one with the most accurate understanding of the student's special need(s).

-Work initiated with the mentor might be more readily integrated into the student's ongoing program if the classroom teacher has been involved in coordinating the mentorship and has ownership for it.

3) Independent Study. Opportunities for students to engage in exploratory study or pursue closely defined in-depth projects individually or in cluster.

Advantages:

-The classroom teacher may be most aware of their students' special abilities, interests and independent study needs.

4) Special Advanced Courses. Opportunities for students to engage in specialized areas of study.

Advantages:

-An efficient, as well as, effective use of existing resources may be realized in those situations where the regular classroom teacher has the necessary expertise to facilitate the advanced course and where the scheduling can be managed.

-It may provide an incentive for staff members to acquire additional expertise through planned professional growth activities.

5) Executive Internships. Opportunities for students to work and learn on-site in a field of study or practicum relationship with a mentor (business, the arts, the professions, industry). The study effort represents an advanced

learning opportunity for the student of demonstrated or potential talent and is not to be confused with any general work program aimed solely to earn money while attending school.

Advantages:

-The student's classroom teacher may be most knowledgeable about the student's abilities and needs.

-The integration of an internship with school activities may be effectively managed by the particular sending teacher.

6) Cluster (Task) Grouping. Formal grouping of students working in a task situation usually over a specified periods of time. The composition of the groups varies depending upon task demands. Task clusters include:

I. Skills Lab: 2-12 students
II. Cooperative Team Learning: 20-50 students
III. Interest Exploration: 5-20 students
IV. Curricular Seminars: 8-18 students

Advantages:

-The regular classroom teacher may be the most knowledgeable regarding the strengths and needs of his/her students and be able to make the best judgments regarding grouping.

-Within the classroom there may be a greater tendency to involve more students in the different groupings.

7) Content Acceleration. Acceleration in areas of study which describe a continuum of study or sequence of skills in some hierarchical relationship.

Advantages:

-The classroom teacher may be familiar with the students' abilities and interests.

-The classroom teacher may provide advanced study opportunities within the regular classroom structure.

-It may provide an incentive to the classroom teacher to gain further expertise in working with advanced students.

8) Grade Level Acceleration. Moving students of outstanding performance ahead at least one grade level. [Use selectively-perhaps best for early ages - e.g. pre-school or early admission at the university level.]

Advantages:

-Given a receptive teacher, and close consideration of the student's social, physical, emotional and intellectual needs, a child may be placed effectively.

There are certainly many positive aspects to consider for each of these instructional strategies, as well as, practical concerns that must always be taken into account whenever a program is being devised. It is suggested that educators use whatever strategies best suit their classroom needs and what best complements their own teaching styles. Most children, exceptional or not, will learn from each other and the learning situation, perhaps even more so when G/T instruction is incorporated into the regular classroom via these strategies, and with teachers who are sensitive to their cultural, as well as, educational needs.

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